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SUBJECT: CHINA HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST JOHN KAMM URGES
COORDINATED US BIALTERAL AND MULTILATERAL EFFORTS

Classified By: CDA Mark C. Storella, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: John Kamm, Executive Director of the Dui Hua Human Rights Foundation, discussed with Charge March 30 Dui Hua's efforts to win release of Chinese prisoners of conscience. Kamm suggested coordinating U.S. bilateral and multilateral efforts to optimize U.S. leverage to improve Chinese human rights performance. Such coordination, he argued, would help China learn to play a responsible role in multilateral politics. End summary.

MULTILATERAL CHINA

¶2. (C) Charge opened the conversation by observing that China's behavior on the Geneva stage was as a non-aligned, non-responsible, developing world country, with very aggressive action on a few key issues. Kamm responded that he saw China as an "adolescent", still "unsure, gawky and blustery" in using its great weight in an effective manner. He urged the USG to remind China that they no longer had the luxury of pretending they were not a great nation with great clout on the world stage. He advised close coordination between USG multilateral and bilateral discussions with China. Far too often China avoided real accountability by successfully shuffling issues from one to the other.

¶3. (C) For example, he urged that we not "forget" cases we had raised bilaterally when we interact with China in the context of Geneva multilateral bodies. This would demonstrate our seriousness and could be effective even if such issues were only raised on the sidelines of multilateral discussions. He had just received the first written list of prisoners that China had provided in nearly a year during his March 2009 visit to Beijing, and consequently, he wondered if the U.S. might highlight a handful of prisoner cases to the UN's Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Charge said he would check on the feasibility of that procedure.

¶3. (C) John Kamm's acquaintance with the current Chinese ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Li Baodong, dates from the days when Li and Kamm worked on China's Most Favored Nation status. Contrary to the cautious bureaucrat the Charge had observed in Geneva meetings, Kamm painted a picture of a strong, smart risk-taker. Kamm said he had found that Chinese diplomats only ever showed their true colors and true flexibility when separated from other Chinese diplomats; with three or more Chinese in the room, one could be assured of getting nothing but the strictest party line.

LEVERAGING US SILENCE AT CHINA'S UPR

¶4. (C) Kamm understood our silence at China's review during the February 2009 session of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR; the UN's new mechanism to discuss the human rights situation in every UN member state) was due to its timing just after the start of a new administration. However, he suggested using our silence -- and China's consequent perception that we had taken a "correct position on UPR" -- to push for increased Chinese cooperation on human rights issues. Specifically, he recommended the USG push hard on the crack in China's silence on the issue of prisoners held for "reeducation through labor". (Note: During their UPR, China provided the first figures since 1994 on the number of such prisoners; the extremely low number given probably indicates that more are being held in regular prisons, where due process improves but living conditions decline). The USG should also focus on China's mention of a special rapporteur's visit, as well as on their promise to accede to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.
STORELLA